

The Library Assistant

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HON. EDITOR: A. C. JONES
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Steady, Chaps

LIBRARIANS of the staid generation seem to tumble inevitably into strange and illogical attitudes towards their younger colleagues in general and the A.A.L. in particular. Few of them are so self-conscious about it as Eratosthenes, but then few have persevered so assiduously for such a long time, or can look back with such just satisfaction to their own summer and salad days—though we understand that present-day scholars are extremely sceptical of his claim to have worked in a library at all. We are delighted to learn, however, that this venerable colleague has found in our pages some evidence of a revival of the spirit of that “super-sensitive generation in which younger librarians fulminated against the flabby brains and saurian hides” of their elders. If we are not mistaken this is intended as a compliment; it is one which we shall seek always to deserve. “Come the three corners of the *World* in arms, and we shall shock them.”

Letting off steam, even “exploding” upon occasion, is a very healthy process during one’s professional adolescence, but we recognise that it may be a wasteful one unless every morsel of experience so gained is turned to good account in the future. The discipline of marshalling one’s emotions into an argument is bound to be a valuable one—and if there is value in the argument itself so much the better

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It is our particular responsibility to serve as a training-ground as well as a battlefield; we welcome alike the truly adolescent and the assistant whose formal training is long since past. Only for the obsolescent is there no place in our pages.

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In a further letter to his gossip, Zenodotus, the sage above-mentioned, writes:—

“You draw my attention to a paper in *The Library Assistant* which advocates certain methods of boot-licking and other trickery as likely to lead to the young librarian’s advancement. It is meant to be humorous and is not the work of a beginner. We can hardly expect enthusiasm from youngsters who are so admonished.”

Here is Zeno-dotage indeed! We cannot believe that any younger readers have so naively misinterpreted the tenor of this article. Satire has ever demanded a supple mind—and it is no more “meant to be humorous” than the gilded pill is meant to be gold.

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WE do not intend at this late hour to enter upon a discussion of the pros and cons of "Brophy's penny." The matter has been thoroughly ventilated in both the professional and the national press, and the protagonists, it would seem, are now engaged in regrouping in preparation for a further assault. In reviewing the arguments put forward on either side, we could wish only that the case against the levy had been based more firmly on principle and less on the practical problems involved. But the recently published *Books are essential* (Andre Deutsch, 7s. 6d.)—a positive illustration of its thesis that books are becoming more and more expensive—discusses wider issues which must command the serious consideration of all of us who are connected with the book trade. It consists of statements by a representative author, publisher, public librarian, commercial librarian, and bookseller, each of whom discusses the present crisis in the book trade from his own point of view. No attempt has been made to present a united front to the problems, and consequently the contributors frequently put forward conflicting arguments which must be resolved by further discussion if this little book is to be effective in pointing a way out of present difficulties.

Once more, for example, the publisher, Michael Joseph, trots out his *bête noire*: "As for the public libraries, they supply novels free!!! [Our exclamation marks] . . . Can anyone reasonably oppose the suggestion that no-one should be allowed to borrow novels free from a public library unless his income is below a certain level?" (Some of us have reached a similar conclusion from a different first premise: Public libraries make all the people pay for the light reading of some of the people). In our discussions with other members of the book trade we find ourselves constantly up against this fundamental misconception; they cannot or will not understand that the public library is at bottom no more than an organization to enable X readers to club together and provide X (or so) books for their collective use, under the care of a trained staff, instead of sitting at home in glorious isolation with one book each. It follows therefore that the equivalent of an increased subscription in the public library is an increase in the library rate, yet these laymen would tell us that because prices are rising and commercial library subscriptions are rising, we too should now charge a subscription *on top of the library rate* for the benefit of our brethren. Now we are back at "Brophy's penny," which is suggested as a solution to but one of the many concurrent crises which are discussed in this symposium.

The book trade is trying to wriggle out of a cleft stick. However essential we may all believe books to be, large numbers of readers, would-be readers and have-been readers persist in regarding them as luxuries. Publishers are unable any longer to hold prices at the present level, and yet they fear that any substantial increase will result in such a considerable reduction in sales that the trade will collapse. And the fact that it is the existence of public libraries which apparently enables readers to regard books as luxury purchases draws down upon our heads the envious wrath of our colleagues.

Clearly the matter cannot be allowed to rest here. Indeed, it will not rest here, whether we would allow it or not. This association can provide a framework in which further discussion of at least one point of view can take place, and some Divisions might feel that a joint meeting with local

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booksellers would provide a stimulating change from our usual closed circle. We hesitate to make such a revolutionary suggestion, but could not the hand of friendship also be extended to commercial librarians on such an occasion?

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The particular crisis which has precipitated the publication of *Books are essential* is the threat to the Net Book Agreement occasioned by the late Government's declaration on retail price maintenance. We have lately heard no more of this threat, and the danger may perhaps be past; but we must be prepared as a profession at any time to join in the defence of an agreement on which the good health of literature—to say nothing of public library economics—so largely rests. Some of the evils which must result from an abolition of the Net Book Agreement are painfully satirized by Edmund Wilson in his *Memoirs of Hecate County* (W. H. Allen). It is a great pity that this book, which contains talk of music, painting, literature and social and political problems such as seldom comes our way, should have received adverse publicity from the fact that it contains passages which can be read for quite the wrong reason by people with unhealthy minds. As librarians we may find it necessary to exercise some discretion in making this book available; as healthy, intelligent readers, we must not let it escape us. The story with which we are especially concerned—*The Milhollands and their damned soul*—contains only one sentence which the queasiest stomach could find salacious; and the only rude word in it is the one in the title. It is a study of literary standards in decline; of the book club "racket" and the concoction of best-sellers. It should be read by everyone with a concern for such things—and by anyone who is not quite sure what is meant by "sub-literature." And especially should it be read after *Books are essential* by anyone who still thinks that the abandonment of the Net Book Agreement might do no very great harm.

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We welcome the first number of the *Eastern Caribbean Library Review*, the bulletin of the Trinidad and Tobago Library Staff Guild. The problems which we encounter in this country in creating a sense of professional fellowship must be infinitely greater in a library system serving the Eastern Caribbean, the largest island of which contains only sixty librarians. Some such publication as this would seem to be a necessity, and we wish it every success. In their final appeal for contributions the editors say: "It has always been our impression that the work of an editor was to edit, and not to provide the text." We know the feeling.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION.

Much time, trouble and temper can be saved by "opting" for the A.A.L. in the appropriate place in the form provided when you pay your annual subscription to the Library Association. By doing so, you ensure continuity of membership of this Section, your right to vote for Officers and Councillors of the A.A.L., and your monthly copy of this journal.

You are reminded that the subscription was due on January 1st. Both the Library Association and this Section will be pleased if you pay as soon as possible. **DO IT NOW—and DON'T FORGET TO OPT!**

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A New Year Message from the President

THE New Year is traditionally a season of new hope, especially to people who are young, young in spirit as well as young in years. May I tell you some of my hopes as a librarian and as President of the A.A.L.?

First obviously for peace and then for a recovery of financial stability not only in this country, but in all other countries; without these two the outlook for libraries is bleak indeed. For a revival of the spirit of adventure and of *joie de vivre*, in libraries and in life generally. For the unity of the profession: that all librarians, in special, university and public libraries, may recognise the many similarities rather than the few differences in their various types of work, and to this end, that the A.A.L. may give increasing attention to its non-public library members. For wise, liberal and, sometimes, adventurous policies in all the counsels of the profession, that the enthusiasm of youth may not turn to frustration, nor the experience of age to cynicism, but each support and guide the other. For an upsurge of ideas and ideals, for hard thought and firm convictions and for a sense of urgency in our work. And that the young assistants of to-day will not simply accept the ideas of their seniors, but will break new ground and contribute to the profession, and to the world, even more than the great librarians of the past have done.

You will each one of you have your own private and personal hopes for the future. I send you my best wishes that these may come true. I hope to meet as many of you as possible during this year at Divisional meetings and at the A.A.L. Conference, and if I can be of any service to any individual member, please do not hesitate to write to me.

F. A. SHARR.

Discussion

RIGHT ROAD?

MR. MEALOR is in a fortunate position in being able to provide the service which he describes in his letter printed in your November issue.

It is apparent that he is able to give this service for one of two reasons: either (a) that an abnormally high rate is levied by his local authority for library purposes, or (b) that a comparatively small proportion of the population to whom he is responsible for library facilities use these facilities. The former reason is an extremely unlikely one, for few authorities would be bold enough to levy a rate high enough to provide a service of this kind for *all* its potential users. The latter reason is probably the relevant one, for that this situation exists in the vast majority of library systems throughout the country is evident by the fact that the national average of registered readers is but 25 per cent.

It is noticeable that the branch library concerned is part of a county system and it seems to me probable that only a small proportion of the population uses, or attempts to use it, because of the inconvenience of the respective geographical locations of service point and reader in very many cases. Now in large urban systems we have all our potential readers on our doorsteps, with the result that a much larger proportion of the population

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attempts to draw on its library facilities and it is inevitable that we just cannot cope with the demand for "light literature." The branch library at which I am at present employed is situated in a poor and very densely populated area and I am convinced that if the book fund (which is already an exceptionally high percentage of total expenditure) were trebled, we would be little nearer to creating the situation existing in branches of the kind described by Mr. Mealor. The fact is that in all cases, the actual users of public libraries are either living (as in Mr. Mealor's case), or attempting to live (as in my own), on the backs of their fellow ratepayers.

It seems to me to be a sound principle that whatever service the whole of the community draws upon, the whole of the community ought to pay for, but that where a section of the community only uses such a service, direct payment should be made by the consumers in due proportion to the amount consumed, and the burden not placed on the shoulders of all. In the case of the provision of books by a public library, the whole of the community must benefit by the provision of books of an educational or cultural nature, even though the number of people actually using those books is but a small proportion of the number paying for them. Such provision will help those people to perform better their respective functions, whether they be professional people, technicians, craftsmen, etc., or merely people whose aim is better citizenship by the attainment of wider educational or cultural development, and the better service they are thereby equipped to give to their fellow men is a fair return for the money expended. The case of books provided solely for entertainment is surely an entirely different one. Here the only person to reap any benefit is the individual reader, and he offers nothing in return to those who have provided his reading material.

Only one person in four of our entire population is a registered public library reader, the proportion of *active* readers must be less, and the proportion of people reading the kind of book which falls into the "light literature" category, still less. We have the situation, therefore, wherein each reader of light literature has the provision of his material subsidised by at least three other ratepayers. It is no exaggeration to say that in some cases the number of people subsidising services for one reader is as high as twenty!

For other kinds of recreation, payment is normally made by the individual and there seems to be no reason why those who find their recreation in reading should be singled out for special treatment. I find that I must pay for any municipally provided facilities for entertainment or recreation, including the use of a swimming bath, tennis court, bowling green, entrance to a concert hall, dance hall or theatre, the hire of a boat on a park lake, etc. Why does the reader of light fiction get his entertainment for nothing?

An analysis of costs reveals some startling facts. In my own city, the average overall cost per issue is approximately 4d. It is safe to assume, therefore, that the cost per fiction issue is not less than 2d. There are numerous families who draw on the public library stocks to the extent of 12 books per week or more and often these are all of the lightest kind. Each of such families therefore receives at least 2s worth of service per week. With a rate for library purposes of 6½d. in the pound, a family occupying a house with a rateable value of £12 (a moderate figure locally) pays approxi-

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mately 6s. 6d. per year, or 1½d. per week, for its library services: 2s. worth of service for 1½d.!!

If we have money to spare from our rates to allocate to the use of a special section of the community, let it be spent on those needing it most. A few hundred yards from this branch library, where I serve up daily, *free of charge*, liberal quantities of worthless printed material, is a public wash-house provided by the local authority to enable those unfortunate enough to be without the necessary facilities in their own homes, to launder their clothes—and where they pay for the privilege of keeping themselves clean.

JOHN R. SHARP, A.L.A. (*Branch Librarian, Hull P.L.*).

SURELY it is time that public librarianship made up its mind? Libraries exist for a purpose, not necessarily all purposes, and while the argument goes on about what is sub-literature and what is "good" this purpose will not be kept in mind. If only for economic reasons, librarians must draw the line somewhere in their book selection. They must decide just how far specialist needs can be provided for, and what subjects can, or should be developed, and have no hesitation in referring elsewhere those readers not specifically catered for. The extent of inter-library co-operation shows just how much one library depends on others.

Yet, according to some, we are to cater for all comers in the realm of light reading. I cannot believe that to rely on borrowing an art book rather than to buy it, because the cost is three guineas, but on the same day to spend that amount on westerns, detectives, and romances, is good librarianship, or "fair shares of reading to all." The resulting issue figures look good I know, but public library service ought not to be judged on issues per pound sterling.

Light literature is not to be decried simply because it is light, but I believe that librarians will fail in their duty to the community if the bulk of their stock, or too high a proportion of it, is of this type, and is provided at the expense of satisfying more serious demands. It so frequently happens that the reader who comes in for a novel goes away satisfied, while the man who wants to find out about diseases in poultry has to put his name down for a book the library does not possess.

O. W. KEEN, A.L.A. (*Westminster P.L.*).

CORRESPONDENTS' tone about libraries and the sub-literature problem is far too apologetic. In the 1890's, Shaw in his music criticisms demanded the taxation of the rich to provide a soundly financed National Opera, pointing out that although some people had no interest in opera, everyone was already paying, in taxes, for bridges and roads they might never use. To-day we pay not only for bridges and roads, but for the medical attention of those we wish not well and the funeral expenses of those we wish not dead; for the prevention of foot and mouth disease in Sussex and the establishment of a hydro-electric station in Scotland which we possibly care nothing about. What, then, is the answer for the librarian faced with the question—usually from a fellow librarian—"Why are you not providing the books Mr. John Brown wants and pays his rates for?"

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Simply this: we are providing something better. Like the National Gallery, the Royal Opera House, and any Arts Council-backed enterprise, they are there for him to make use of if he wants to. If he objects to the provision of, say, Shakespeare's complete works at the expense of his desire for Westerns, then he may as well object to the salary being paid to a National Gallery caretaker on the grounds that he personally wouldn't be bothered if El Greco's *Agony in the Garden* were thrown under the fountains in Trafalgar Square.

But to realities. "Penny dreadfuls" and "erotic paperbacks." Do these, the physical objects themselves, deserve a place in our arguments? I say no. Is there a librarian, a library assistant, a library committee man, or a member of the library-using public who *expects* to see these on the library shelves? Even, our mythical Mr. Brown who has given up the library in disgust would not expect to see them. Do we expect the Tate Gallery to provide an exhibition of pornographic photographs?

Now, of course, we find ourselves with those near relations who appear on our shelves in respectable public library dress: Thrillers, Romances, Westerns, and some Detectives, too. For the present let us provide them—*utterly grudgingly*. To serious (excuse the lapse into jargon) readers who are defrauded thereby we can at least say we are not censors of what Mr. Brown reads. For the future let us aim at Mr. Brown's children. Isn't it a pity that for lack of better distributed taxation we can't give each child attaining the age of twelve a copy of Mr. Trease's *Enjoying books* for his or her very own? "To Jonathan Brown, with the compliments of So-an-So Public Library, its Librarian and a wise government, national and local"—Jonathan Brown will be Mr. Brown of his generation, and that Mr. Brown may be a reader, or a library committee man . . . or a librarian.

L. G. DURBIDGE, A.L.A. (Willesden P.L.).

RECENT editorial and correspondence columns of the *Assistant* have been devoted to a discussion of standards of fiction supply. This ancient topic appears to retain its interest as, indeed, it must until its vitality is drained by a settled policy which shall be sufficiently realistic to be appropriate to the resources of systems and the needs of readers.

Baldly stated, the problem is: Should public libraries supply readers with what we can conveniently term light fiction? The material, with which we are concerned lies between the range of the anti-social novels on the one hand, and the novels of distinct literary value on the other. It possesses little literary value, yet has the social virtue of providing a means of wholesome recreation.

If the public library exists to serve all the people there would appear to be no doubt that the material in question should be supplied. The extent of the supply is a fit subject for controversy. Resources are limited and we may, perhaps, agree that no one type of reader should be favoured at the expense of others. Supply of light fiction, as of other classes, should be governed by the needs of readers taken in conjunction with the value of the material. Thus a system with a large proportion of poorly educated readers could claim a high need factor. Its supply of light fiction would, therefore, be correspondingly greater per head of population than that of a system where uneducated readers were in the minority.

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Such method may sound complicated. In practice it is surprisingly simple, for every practising librarian knows his readers and has a fairly good idea of their capabilities. He is aware, too, of the vital fact that the cultivation of taste demands a background of related experience in the reader. This consideration should influence supply.

The policy of supplying needs will, of course, fall short of satisfying demand. That cannot be avoided and should not be a cause of anxiety, for provision should be linked with a positive method of reader guidance to assist readers to widen their scope. Guidance is particularly necessary in the circumstances now under consideration. The limited reader is plunging blindly if he attempts to extend his range unaided; small wonder that the attempt is seldom made or continuously pursued. All the methods of guidance, by personal assistance, displays and lists should be enrolled in progressive systems.

What is the alternative? To restrict the supply to works of definite literary value? That method will lose many readers, being based on a concealed policy of restricted enrolment. It represents a dereliction of duty, for the librarian has no mandate to confine his attentions to a privileged section of the community. A democratic institution should be prepared to supply the educational, informational and recreational needs of the community. Recreational reading is valuable as long as recreation is valuable; the recreational aspect of supply cannot be discarded for any section of our readers without detriment to the value of a service that claims to be regarded as a social agency.

And what shall we say about the problems of improvement of taste? Simply that the possibility is there when the reader is present, but is for ever absent when the reader has been banished.

E. M. Forster once wrote:

"We have, in this age of unrest, to ferry much old stuff across the river, and the old stuff is not merely books, pictures and music, but the power to understand and enjoy them."

C. A. ELLIOTT, F.L.A. (*Deputy Borough Librarian, Shoreditch P.L.*).

H. M. TOMLINSON once wrote that a librarian "must laugh lightly lightly at the joke of it when he observes the importance which the public appears to attach to his office." I suggest that it is only because we have been and still are "laughing at the joke" that our status in the eyes of our readers is so low.

The *Assistant* in 1951 printed two articles, one by John Horner, the other by Peter New, two librarians who realise that this is no laughing matter. One might have expected them to receive support, but on the contrary, what happens? The November *Assistant* prints two letters, from J. K. Meador and Miss U. M. Gueroult, the first smug, the second facetious.

Perhaps this problem really affects only the counter assistant. He it is who spends his evenings studying classification and bibliography, and his days searching the shelves for westerns and romances. He it is who realises that the public, for all their friendliness, regard him, and through him all librarians, as no more than glorified shop-assistants. When we try to

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"rival or surpass" the subscription libraries, what else can we expect? "Eight pounds a week for giving books out! Nonsense!" says the average reader, and let's face it—it is nonsense. It would not be nonsense, however, to expect twice as much if we were only to attempt the work for which our present studies and qualifications fit us.

B. STRADLING (*Lancs. Co.L.*)

MORALE.

I SN'T IT about time we stopped all this rhetorical talk about the library always trying to provide "the right book for the right reader" and started to try and put some of our ideals into practice?

How many of the junior staff have received training in the knowledge of books and how to obtain them for the reader, before being thrust into the counter to answer queries as best they may, while the senior staff busy themselves in the administrative departments and surround themselves with such an aura of officialdom that the junior hardly dares to penetrate the hallowed precincts with anything so trivial as a reader's enquiry? How many librarians give their staff an opportunity of seeing the new accessions each week, and encourage them to make critical appreciations of additions to the stock?

No! The chief has other more important things to attend to, and so the poor, inexperienced, unhelped junior is left to the mercy of a demanding public. It is often left to the newest, rawest assistant to exploit the stock of a library to which he himself has just been introduced—a man with one eye trying to lead the blind.

What of the enterprising young assistant who wants to know more of the contents of books? How guilty he feels when caught behind a book-stack just glancing through a recent addition when he should be shelving. Time is the whip used on the junior assistant—so many books to be shelved by 9.30, so many overdue to be written by 4.0, and so on. Books, as such, are of minor importance, while overdues, reservations, and making the tea loom large. In theory, of course, most of these routine duties enable the assistant to learn more about books and authors and the classification system used. In practice it is doubtful whether they help him at all, especially as he is constantly urged to hurry and finish the job more quickly.

So much has been written about the opportunities which a junior library assistant has to-day, and yet chief librarians maintain that most juniors do not exhibit any apparent interest in and enthusiasm for their work, and do not display any initiative. With whom does the fault lie? The situation seems to call for some compromise and honest agreement between chief librarians and their assistants. Let the chiefs clarify their ideas about what they require from juniors in the way of competency, efficiency, intelligence, willingness and enthusiasm, and give some thought to what the juniors may reasonably require from them. Only when chief librarians make it their duty to spend more time with their staff, instructing and encouraging instead of dictating and criticising, will the juniors respond with interest and enthusiasm in their work. Until then, routine duties will continue to be practised as merely routine, the borrowers will still be served with indifference, and the library service will still fail to be as full and efficient as it could be.

MISS R. V. ROBINSON (*Kent Co.L.*)

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EXAMINATIONS.

MUCH HAS been written upon the subject of the Library Association's examination questions and the answers given to them—by examiners, tutors and eminent librarians. Little is heard (perhaps fortunately) of the opinion of the candidates who fail these examinations, some with faithful regularity.

As one of that unhappy brigade, which contributes more to the funds of the Association than any other section of its members, may I make an appeal for the more simplified framing of questions? I do not mean that the questions should be easier—a standard has been set and should be adhered to—but the wording of some recent questions is most involved. How often does one leave the examination room thinking: "I think I see it now. If only it had been worded more simply"?

Ambiguous phraseology is apparently a failing of examiners, and woolly if erudite questions receive woolly and valueless answers. Can something be done?

E. ANDREW (*North Riding Co.L.*)

THE NOVEMBER-DECEMBER EXAMINATIONS.

Two new names appear among the commentators, and I am grateful indeed for their services: L. J. Shaw, whose lively contribution appears below, has taken over comments on the Entrance examination; L. M. Payne is undertaking Registration Assistance to Readers. The policy of selecting questions for comment is being continued; so, too, will there be occasional "higher criticism," when it seems to be called for.

A.J.W.

Entrance Examination

Leonard J. Shaw.

It is notoriously difficult for the experienced and mature to put themselves into the shoes of the inexperienced and immature. A mature person's opinion of the papers set at this examination would, I think, be that the questions were reasonable and straightforward; yet it appears to me that some of them (in the first paper, for instance) might well have caused the inexperienced considerable perturbation, for they pre-suppose an approach and a maturity not to be expected in the average "Entrance" examinee: especially so when one considers that this is supposed to be an examination to test "suitability" rather than a professional examination. My forecast (which I hope is proved completely wrong) is that the percentage of passes will consequently be lower than usual.

It is unfortunate that Q.1 on the first paper was so badly worded; examinees to whom I have spoken have had some hard things to say about this—and rightly so. Examiners (doubtless with adequate reason) frequently complain of the inability of candidates to express themselves clearly: they should remember that lucidity (like charity) must begin at home. Q. 3, too, could have been more happily phrased, although the subject is one upon which all examinees should be amply informed. In Q. 4 it should be appreciated that even if such publications are thought to be valuable, they must still be assessed in competition with other valuable activities; it must be

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realised, too, that the expense of producing such publications is now very considerable. What *kind* of publication is most useful: reports, general book lists, subject lists, class lists, bulletins? Some evaluation of their comparative worth should be given. What results *are* achieved? Remember that these may be disappointing because the method of distribution is wasteful or inefficient; e.g., wholesale distribution at the service counters instead of a "mailing list" distribution to readers known to be interested.

The second paper offers quite a good choice of topics. In Q.3 "author mark" will possibly fall a little strangely on the ears of some younger assistants. Some absolutely truthful answers to Q.5 might have been completely devastating in respect of *some* library catalogues! The degree of importance of such a loss would vary considerably according to the availability of other records that could mitigate the seriousness of the catastrophe; e.g., a shelf register could form a rather primitive classified catalogue; accession records (if kept on cards or in sheaf form) could be used as an author catalogue or an author index; and so on. The index to the classification schedules would be very useful for subject enquiries, and trade catalogues and bibliographies for other information. The Regional Bureau would doubtless do very good business, too! The fundamental importance of the catalogue as an inventory of stock and as a finding medium must be appreciated.

The use of the word "sections" in Q. 2 of the third paper seems to have upset some candidates; the preface to the 1950-51 edition of Kempe says that "the more obvious of the changes . . . is the removal of all those sections and part numbers which have appeared in every preceding issue". The material has been re-arranged "in a more orderly and consecutive manner," and this re-arrangement has no doubt inspired the question set. Although the section numbers have been abolished, the work still must be divided into various parts or groups, however: perhaps the avoidance of the actual word "sections" in the question might have put candidates more at ease. Section B of this paper necessarily involves a good deal of juggling with questions and set books: the necessity for such prestidigitation is largely forced upon the examiners by the syllabus, with its arbitrary limitation to 23 reference books. The result on occasion is such an absurdity as Q. 6 where from *different* books one must find information on libretto, metro-nome, bagpipe, ballad (among other subjects named): surely this is a violation of the fundamental principle that the most likely source be first approached when seeking information. Material on these four topics, one would expect, is comfortably contained in Grove.

Finally the essay, which is intended to see whether the candidate can write English (although I should have thought the examiner would already have found this out after marking the previous three papers). The subjects set ranged from those suitable to the first form of the grammar school to those on which a Ph.D. thesis might be written: such provision certainly offers a field of choice sufficiently wide to accommodate *any* student, and we should therefore not cavil at it unduly. The examiners will, no doubt, read a good deal about "a novel which time has proved to be a classic" and "a Shakespeare play"—especially those which have recently appeared in the cinema: but they are long-suffering souls. Such subjects are

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innocuous enough, but several people to whom I have spoken (both inside and outside the library profession), have expressed doubts about the wisdom of such a question as "on what qualities does the greater popular influence of Winston S. Churchill rest?"

The Junior in America

This article by Dr. A. H. Lancour, Assistant Director of Library School, University of Illinois, was first published in a recent issue of the "North Western Newsletter." It is of such general interest that the short extract which appeared in our last issue is felt to be inadequate, and we here reproduce the article in full.

YOUR Editor has requested me to comment briefly on the methods by which we encourage participation in professional activities, especially attendance at meetings.

While I certainly wish to avoid giving the impression that all is perfection in America, I would still wish to record that this is not considered by us to be a problem of major dimensions. Professional activity above and beyond the requirements of the individual job is generally recognised in our country as one of the responsibilities of a librarian. These ideas are instilled in the young student while he is getting his professional training in library school. It is also widely recognised as being one of the ways in which an individual makes his reputation, widens his professional acquaintance and thus contributes to his professional career.

It should be recognised, however, that distances in America make attendance at the National meetings not only a time-consuming but an expensive enterprise. For that reason the young librarian is apt to find the first outlet for his excess energies in local or regional organizations and meetings. These are many and varied and cover all parts of the country.

British librarians who have been in attendance at American conferences unanimously speak of their bewilderment at the range and number of activities which take place. Certainly an American Library Association Annual Conference resembles nothing so much as a three-ring circus. While it is so organized that it offers something for everyone, this often means that any one individual would like to be in three different places at the same time. However, this is an embarrassment of riches and is certainly better than poverty under any circumstances. The point is that every reasonable interest of a librarian in respect to the functions he performs, or the type of library in which he is located, is fairly well provided for.

This fragmentation results in a relatively large number of small specialised groups. For that reason it is quite easy for the young librarian soon to find a niche for himself in which he can make a contribution. In all of our organizations and their meetings special attention is given to the new member to see to it that he is properly introduced, made to feel at home and quickly brought into the circle.

Some years ago a young members' round-table was formed in the American Library Association. While it served a useful purpose in bringing younger members together for discussion of common problems, it has never been a very large organization; it has never and could not ever attain the

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stature of your own Association of Assistant Librarians for example. As far as I am aware this need for a group in apposition to the body of head librarians has never been felt. It may be that the gulf between the librarian and his staff is not so marked in our country. The administration of the American library is the responsibility of the entire staff of the library and questions of policy, whether concerned with book selection, salary scales, or selection of personnel, would be treated by the staff itself acting as a committee under the chairmanship of the chief librarian.

It must be remembered, however, that the American system draws a fairly sharp distinction between professional and non-professional workers. Young people in clerical or sub-professional positions in the library would have no interest in nor be expected to participate in professional activities. They would not do so until they had pursued their training for librarianship and had entered upon professional paths.

Opportunities in America

J. C. HARRISON, *Senior Lecturer, Manchester School of Librarianship*, writes:—

The following is an extract from a letter received from Dr. John A. Lowe, Director, Rochester Public Library, New York, U.S.A.—

Interest seems to be evident among overseas librarians in assuming temporary assignments in American libraries. The Rochester (New York) Public Library has decided to continue currently appointments as *Interne Librarians* of British chartered librarians with public library experience. To assist in the selection of the right kind of librarian who will be of use in the Library's service and a credit to United Kingdom librarianship a committee of British librarians will make recommendations. Mr. J. Clement Harrison, School of Librarianship, College of Technology, Manchester; Mr. Charles Nowell, City Librarian, Manchester Public Libraries; and Mr. Edward Sydney, Borough Librarian, Leyton Public Libraries, have accepted the invitation to serve as the committee. Appointments are for one year, with assignments in either subject reference divisions at the main library, or in work with children or adults in the branch libraries as the need may be, at an annual salary of \$2,820.

The committee will recommend three Children's Librarians from applications received before February 1st, 1952; five Subject Reference Division Assistants from applications received before May 1st, 1952. A candidate should send his application to one of the members of the recommending committee.

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CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN EXCHANGE.

Miss Betty J. Du Pont, 147, West 105 Street, New York, 25, N.Y., U.S.A., a Children's Librarian on the staff of the Queens Borough Public Library, would like to hear from any U.K. Children's Librarian interested in an exchange of duties. Will interested persons please write direct to Miss Du Pont.

We regret that the name J. Haywood, *photographer*, was wrongly given as Hayward in last month's review of the filmstrip *Library Adventure*.

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Small Ads. or Library Publicity?

J. GREEN, *Librarian, Central Lending Library, Manchester P.L.*

THE term publicity, and let us be frank, we do mean advertising, is borrowed from the commercial world, and springs from the need to speed up the passage of goods from the retailers' shelves to the consumer. Goods on the move are remunerative; goods arrested half way are wasteful and often a liability. This is equally true of the books on library shelves. The business man's aim is to sell goods to anyone that will buy; so too is that of the librarian. The former knows all about his commodity, a lot about that of his competitors; his aims are clear-cut, and consumer knowledge is hard sought after. The librarian's path we can see, diverges a great deal from that of his commercial counterpart. It is very strange, but any mention of books, and still more of readers in our activities, takes the form of an apologetic oblique reference. The alternative is to aetherize the subject to the cultural-democratic plane, couched in the secondhand terms of the politician, often uncleaned, and far too frequently not re-dyed, and any resemblance to the current practice of the speaker or writer is purely coincidental. The path of the business man is straight. One commodity, limited demand, concentrated effort following conscious aims to a measurable profit. Even the best of them would do no better than we in the field of universal provision and uncertain goals, backed by our limited resources. Their experts give the warning:—

"The incorrigible optimist is the greatest menace advertising ever had . . . The man who thinks that publicity can perform miracles is an enemy to advertising."

Can we talk of publicity in the accepted sense?

If the big guns are not to be ours, we still persist with the small arms. Much print is going to paper for the sake of the cause. How far it succeeds must rest with individual judgment. How far it fails is often too painfully obvious, but it must be judged by the canons of the major code, with no short throws for amateurs. Objective analysis will soon reveal the flaws. To pick up a serious guide to a library service, and to find, under the heading "Newsroom and Ladies' Room," an illustration of a super-hobo, cheerfully exhaling clouds of smoke from yesterday's gathering, stimulates only one emotion—sympathy. To have to scan book-lists arranged under ivory tower quotations or ultra-slick captions can lead only to conjecture as to the colour of the compilers' eyes or to the amount of time thinking them out. The contents when arrived at, could, in many cases be a collation of *Bookseller* adverts, and one can only assume that many subscribe to the opinion of one Chief Librarian, that this type of publicity is useful "to shew the public that we have the books even if they can't have them." When we come to circulation of book-lists we are treading in the realms of professional honour. The first copy, of course, is dispatched for the usual "neatly printed in Gill with Boloni headings" notice. Six and fifty are set aside for Library Schools and libraries that ought to be interested. The remainder, after the extraction of fifty for file against the contingency of universal acclamation, may be distributed for diverse uses, at all service points on the scale of 1 per 1,000 population. This figure may of course be increased by judicious recla-

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mation of clean copies from returned books. The results of the effort would test the abilities of any observer.

For many years now, publicity in the commercial world has ceased to be an isolated element. It is increasingly being more closely linked with market research, which deals with the commodity in relation to its consumers. This field offers the librarian an outlet for his abilities, not through the ballyhoo of Mass Observation surveys that become bogged down in the mysteries of interim reports, but through the unspectacular means of solid hard work locally. This with present staffs means enthusiasm all the way and a sound guiding policy on top. The days of the "all things to all men" conception of the public library are gone, the exchequer has seen to that. There is every evidence to shew that the optimum amount to be had from local rates, for library purposes, has in most areas, been reached, though the expansion of the service has by no means finished. At the moment we are attempting too much. On the one hand we struggle heroically to keep pace with the growing needs of education and enlightened recreation, and on the other we flounder with guilty consciences, in the spheres of extremely fickle entertainment. It is universally recognized that the purse won't stand it, and yet we cannot get past the talking stage of the stand to be made. The reader visits the library in two entirely different moods—for something to read, or, more frequently than we realize, for some book which at that particular point in time is essential to one or other of his many activities. It may be the purchase of a house or it may be the desire to know something of the international steel cartel, stimulated by some chance remark on the radio. Disappointment in the first case usually means a book returned the next day, but in the latter it usually means a disgusted reader, and probably a lost one. Whether we like it or not, "we are committed to the policy of an educated nation," and if the library is to become the force within the community, towards which all our publicity is directed, we must ally ourselves to that policy before the unimaginative do a second Geddes. We must not emulate our "shelf brightening" brethren of the thirties by committing future librarians to buy on a sellers' market, material discarded or neglected through lack of faith and sense of direction. The liberal basis of contemporary education allows no sharp division with enlightened recreation, and modern tendencies shew that all our monies would be amply taken care of in keeping pace with the motivating powers of far stronger stimulants than our own movement. Group activity has never been more dynamic, and interests range over a wide field. Values have changed and are still changing, and if the conception of service within our libraries does not change, they will be submerged in their higher activities, by other agencies enjoying statutory powers and central government backing. Local government will have lost a further function and the profession and the reader will be the losers.

For a number of years certain Holmesian gentlemen have been searching for a mythical percentage of the population who do not use the Public Library, and many vaudeville turns have been put on to procure it, to the prejudice of the real service. In the last ten years of social change, if books in our libraries have not been used to the full capacity of our budget, it would be unwise to blame the consumer. There is an optimum part of the

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community we can really affect, certainly not above 50 per cent., and until the vital needs of this section have been fully exploited it is wrong, economically and morally, to play with the trimmings. It has been the practice of Local Education Authorities for the past few years to issue booklets of the facilities offered: *Learning and Leisure*, *Further Education*, etc., and if any conscientious librarian feels that he can sit back and feel pleased, let him be frightened into examining his stock in relation to these activities locally. When the result has staggered him, the broadly educational activities of such groups as W.E.A., Y.M.C.A., Youth Clubs and Churches will serve merely to grind the lesson home. Then the potentialities of the Book Fund will really be examined. The powers of book rejection will become an art alongside the complementary one of selection. The "scissors and paste" material that finds its way on to library shelves will have to be eradicated. Scholars in all fields realize its presence. Seymour E. Harris, writing the introduction to D. M. Wright's "Capitalism" (McGraw, 1951) states:—

"Popularizers without technical competence, unqualified text-book writers and sometimes even charlatans, control too large a part of the market for ideas."

How true, and what staunch allies they have in public librarians. Stock that has to serve a community must be built up with a detailed knowledge of its needs. The circumstances that allow a bookseller to make the statement:

"I am on the best terms with the librarians in the area in which I have my business: they pay me regular visits and are always ready to consider and frequently to buy any book which I think suitable for their requirement," gives grounds for enquiry.

Would it be radical to suggest that the library has existed for too long as a separate entity, with little knowledge, apart from vague hazards as to what goes on outside? A visit, in the first instance for information, to the groups operating within a library area would greatly increase the librarian's understanding of the types of individuals concerned and the field of their activities. If as a result the stock in the particular field of activity is critically examined, and modified, the complement is complete. The library has the knowledge to deal competently with reader assistance within its walls; it has solid contacts outside, and the reader also realizes that his activities are the concern of at least one local government department. It may be stated categorically that it does work, and the librarian is all the better at his job for having undertaken the task.

To complete the cycle, Publicity as we practice it at present can come into its own. The book-list aimed at one section of the community carries the library's stock, with confidence in its suitability, to potential users. It will carry with it the optimism of the negotiation from strength, instead of the apologetic excuses of limited funds.

When we really get down to work with clear aims and an enthusiasm for carrying them out, we shall be able to stand and say to all comers: "The library service is planned to secure for its users the full and harmonious development of the body, the mind and the spirit for the purpose of personal living, civic responsibility and useful employment," and it won't be conference talk.